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President: Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Vice-President) ..... (Belgium)

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In the absence of Ms. Chatardova (Czechia), Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 7: Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation (*continued*)

(a) Follow-up to policy recommendations of the General Assembly and the Council (*continued*) (A/72/124–E/2018/3, A/72/684–E/2018/7 and A/73/63–E/2018/8)

1. **Mr. Liu** Zhenmin (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (A/73/63–E/2018/8), said that the three major agreements adopted in 2015 — the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development — had imposed high demands on the development system. The report provided a factual assessment of how the United Nations development system was shifting to support implementation of the new mandates at the national, regional and global levels. The report had benefited from surveys conducted by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs targeting programme country Governments, resident coordinators, operations management teams and entity headquarters, and from data provided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group Office, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, the High-level Committee on Management and the High-level Committee on Programmes.

2. Alignment of the United Nations development system's planning and activities with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review was still in its initial stages, partly because of the sequencing of internal planning and management alternatives. A common chapter in the strategic plans of four United Nations entities for the period 2018–2021 was a first step. The areas in which the development system had made the most contributions to date primarily concerned the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals, namely health, food security, poverty eradication, gender equality and education. Looking forward, the Organization would need to boost its capacities in other areas. The United Nations had been successful in assisting Governments to identify those furthest behind, but less so in helping Governments to reach them, primarily owing to a scarcity of resources.

3. While the development system was effective in developing national capacities, Governments saw the need for a more systematic and coordinated approach to capacity development that made more use of national systems and institutions. The system needed to shift away from sectoral entity-based approaches and strengthen its own capacity to provide integrated policy advice, particularly in middle-income countries, where resident coordinators had highlighted the need to move away from direct support towards policy advice and innovative thinking around resource mobilization.

4. Funding for operational activities for development had more than doubled since 2002, reaching $29.5 billion in 2016, largely because of a significant increase in humanitarian funding. However, the quality of funding was deteriorating: the core share of total funding for operational activities for development was only 24 per cent; there had been no growth in contributions to flexible, non-core funding modalities or inter-agency pooled funds; and contributions through thematic funds had declined. Over 70 per cent of country-level expenditure was concentrated in 27 countries. At the other end of the spectrum, total expenditure for 79 programme countries was less than $50 million, amounting to an average of just $2.7 million per entity present in each country.

5. Mechanisms and capacities in support of leveraging the partnerships needed to implement the 2030 Agenda were a work in progress. Few entities tracked the status and results of partnerships, and more effective policies and guidelines were needed to mitigate potential risks to the reputation of the Organization. The development system must be able to assist Governments in leveraging partnerships to mobilize funding, technology, knowledge and expertise. South-South cooperation had been incorporated into the strategic plans of most entities and 84 per cent of Governments reported that the country teams supported South-South cooperation activities.

6. The presence of the United Nations must be tailored to the specific needs of countries to maximize results and achieve efficiencies. Resident coordinators had reported skills gaps in various areas, including economic analysis and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and had highlighted the limited capacities and authority of resident coordinator offices. Many resident coordinators had commented on potential synergies that could improve the efficiency of human,

financial and physical resources, calling for increased joint programming or even making that the default mode. They had also made proposals on how to improve presence on the ground.

7. Roughly half of programme country Governments had reported that the regional commissions contributed effectively to their countries most pressing regional issues. However, resident coordinators indicated having limited benefits from interaction with the regional commissions, which frequently interfaced directly with Governments. Alternative, cost-effective programmatic models should therefore be explored at both the country and regional levels to improve the interface between United Nations country teams and regional commissions.

8. There was a need to harmonize business practices and shift towards a common back office. The growing number of business operations strategies was already a step forward. Some 75 per cent of United Nations country teams viewed different rules and regulations as the largest barrier to harmonizing business practices. The United Nations Development Group and the High-level Committee on Management were working to address that issue.

9. Lastly, action was necessary on key aspects of results-based management. Governments agreed on the need to simplify United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs), rationalize agency-specific programming and planning processes, and improve the content and coverage of reporting to Governments. There was scope for evaluating UNDAFs more rigorously and improving the management response.

(b) Reports of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund/United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and the World Food Programme (E/2017/34/Rev.1, E/2018/36 and E/2018/65)

Interactive dialogue with the executive heads of the United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies on planning and delivering collective results

10. **The President** asked how the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) would ensure that the particular challenges faced by the most vulnerable countries would continue to receive priority attention following the reform of the United Nations development system.

11. **Mr. Steiner** (Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)), panellist, said that UNDP would continue to prioritize the needs and concerns of low-income and least developed countries, with a particular focus on eradicating poverty and addressing climate change, as evidenced by its flagship initiatives. Under the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, over 80 per cent of resources were earmarked for low-income and least developed countries. Much of the 2030 Agenda centred around the economy as a way to address such issues as inequality and sustainability. While the way in which inequality was discussed varied from one region or organization to another, the economic fundamentals remained the same. The Sustainable Development Goals had focused the attention of the United Nations development system on collective action to meet needs of the most vulnerable countries and ensure that no one was left behind.

12. **The President** asked how the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) would bring its strategic plan into line with the proposed United Nations system-wide strategic document (A/72/684–E/2018/7, annex) and ensure that its efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda were integrated into UNDAFs.

13. **Ms. Fore** (Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)), panellist, said that to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations system must work together, make efficiency savings and accelerate results through innovation and external partnerships. The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, recognized that when a child's nutrition improved, so too did his or her health and ability to learn and, ultimately, earn, thereby helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. It was important to ensure that emergency responses to humanitarian disasters had a long-term impact by fostering sustainable development and making communities more resilient.

14. Inter-agency collaboration could help to close implementation gaps. For example, achieving Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation — an area in which UNICEF had a great deal of expertise — required a collective approach, through partnerships such as Sanitation and Water for All. UNICEF, UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) were working together to implement a common chapter in their strategic plans at all levels, including in the field, and across the programming cycle. The individual country programmes of each entity must be built around collectively identified UNDAFs and national priorities. Resident coordinators should convene country teams

around the Goals in a coordinated and systematic way. The focus must be on outcomes and results, rather than on process and coordination.

15. It was important to find new ways to support adolescents, as addressing the needs of young people would help to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. On the ground, country teams had a key role to play, from analysis and planning to the delivery and monitoring of youth programmes. The United Nations must also establish external partnerships and build a broad coalition of Governments, local and global businesses and non-governmental organizations, with a view to identifying and applying accelerators such as knowledge, data and innovative solutions. UNICEF was already working with the private sector on projects such as online learning for remote communities. United Nations entities must continue to establish common premises, as UNICEF had done in Liberia, resulting in significant savings. UNICEF was piloting similar projects around the world, with a view to establishing common back offices in all countries by 2022.

16. **The President** asked what impact the Joint Steering Committee to advance humanitarian and development collaboration might have at the executive level of the United Nations.

17. **Mr. Beasley** (Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP)), panellist, speaking via video link from Rome, said that the Joint Steering Committee was an extremely practical forum for discussing inter-agency collaboration, particularly as what worked in one country or context might not work elsewhere. The reform process was an opportunity for the United Nations to become more efficient and effective. However having an optimal organizational structure was immaterial if United Nations staff did not support it. If the resident coordinators approached their work with a positive attitude and were committed to the Sustainable Development Goals, a great deal could be achieved. As the logistical arm of the United Nations, WFP had a history of working closely with the rest of the United Nations system.

18. The international community must go beyond merely feeding people and adopt a collective, holistic approach. A piecemeal, silo mentality would cost more in the long run and result in mass migration, conflict and chaos. In the Tigray region of Ethiopia, for example, WFP had worked successfully with the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to transform millions of acres of previously barren land and promote sustainable development, thereby creating business opportunities and jobs while eradicating hunger. However, in the Somali region of Ethiopia, food and water were still being brought in by truck for over 3 million people. Extremist groups could take advantage of such crises to move in, which would have a destabilizing effect. Another problem was desertification, which was forcing pastoralists to travel beyond their traditional pasturelands, increasing the risk of conflict.

19. The international community must also engage with the private sector, which had been shunned for too long. WFP was already working with the private sector in areas such as digitalization, biometrics and blockchain technology, with a view to bringing down costs and improving effectiveness.

20. **The President** said that the Secretary-General, in his report on repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda (A/72/684–E/2018/7), had stated that the specialized agencies, funds and programmes should be more accountable for system-wide mandates and actions, as well as for collective results. He asked how the International Labour Organization (ILO) would respond to that proposal.

21. **Mr. Ryder** (Director General of the International Labour Organization (ILO)), panellist, speaking via video link from Geneva, said that ILO supported the Secretary-General's reform agenda and had embraced the 2030 Agenda from the beginning. The Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 8 on good jobs and economic growth, gave a central place to the decent work agenda of ILO, which had an institutional opportunity and a responsibility to contribute to system-wide mandates. In 2016, ILO had aligned its strategic planning periodicity with the United Nations planning framework, with a view to better contributing to system-wide mandates. ILO had also benchmarked its programmatic activities against the Goals.

22. ILO was engaging actively in various alliances established to deliver on different areas of the 2030 Agenda, including social protection, youth employment, forced labour, child labour, human trafficking and equal pay for men and women. In March 2018, the Deputy Secretary-General would address the ILO Governing Body on the reform process, enabling both the constituents of ILO and United Nations staff in Geneva to receive a direct account of the situation in New York. At the country level, ILO was working actively to align its decent work country programmes with UNDAFs. However, as a specialized agency, ILO had its own mandate and structure, and was accountable to its Governing Body. While that was not a barrier to greater cohesion, such realities must be taken into account when

making proposals to ensure common accountability for system-wide mandates.

23. **The President** asked how the regional commissions could contribute to the road map recommended by the Secretary-General in paragraph 23 (b) of the United Nations system-wide strategic document (A/72/684–E/2018/7, annex). He also wished to know how the United Nations development system could prevent the duplication of work among its various entities.

24. **Ms. Bárcena** (Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); and current Coordinator of the Regional Commissions), panellist, said that the regional commissions had originally been created as intergovernmental platforms to collect and monitor regional data. They aligned the figures provided by Governments and the private sector to produce statistics that might be different to those of the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund but were harmonized throughout the United Nations system. Those statistics were then made available to specialized agencies, but primarily to Member States.

25. It was important to note that, as intergovernmental platforms rather than specialized agencies, regional commissions interacted directly with Member States on the basis of multilateralism, cooperation and integration. They had a dual function of convening specialized sectoral meetings between Member States and specialized agencies in a given region, and collecting data from national statistics offices and government ministries and departments. At regional forums on sustainable development, they brought together Governments to carry out joint assessments of each country's progress towards the 2030 Agenda and its capacity to measure all indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals. The aim was to provide Member States with the information necessary for them to build their own capacities.

26. The Secretary-General's reform aimed to empower systems at the national level. Globalization had brought about progress in some areas but had also caused inequality and had concentrated wealth and technology in the hands of a few. Since many of the means of implementation to address economic problems were at the international or regional level, countries lacked national instruments to empower themselves. In an increasingly complex world order, regional commissions therefore assessed the main challenges facing Member States and assisted them in negotiating processes, even outside the United Nations system. ECLAC had, for example, recently worked closely with the Pacific Ocean Alliance to empower its States parties in trade negotiations. As the 2030 Agenda was universal, it was far more efficient to conduct dialogue by region than to convene all 129 resident coordinators and 193 Member States.

27. To avoid duplication of work, the United Nations development system should establish multilateral intergovernmental platforms in which the regional offices of United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies interacted directly with Member States. Such platforms should work on the basis of peer analysis and reflect the multisectoral nature of the Sustainable Development Goals. They could also be used to promote policy research on applied economics and evidence-based follow-up of the 2030 Agenda, with the aim of strengthening public policy.

28. Regional commissions could provide comparative analysis and fresh economic thinking only if they had access to the realities on the ground. The commissions had achieved considerable efficiencies after two successive bienniums of cuts and had now aligned their programmes with the 2030 Agenda. She proposed holding a special session within the framework of the Economic and Social Council to demonstrate the benefits of collaboration between the regional commissions and the United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies.

29. **The President** asked how UN-Women would integrate the strategic global flagship initiatives into its strategic plan.

30. **Mr. Glemarec** (Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)), panellist, said that in drawing up its strategic plan, UN-Women had tried to anticipate requests by Member States for measures to be ready for immediate implementation. The UN-Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021 was aligned with the common chapter, which in turn was harmonized with the system-wide strategic document and the global flagship initiatives. The UN-Women Executive Board had recently deliberated about whether to set a target for the percentage of the Entity's initiatives to be implemented as standalone projects under UNDAFs and as flagship programme initiatives. In the end, the Executive Board had decided to defer the decision for a few years but expected most UN-Women programmes in the future to be conducted through flagship initiatives.

31. UN-Women fully supported the repositioning of the United Nations development system and intended to leverage the combined strength of United Nations entities to accelerate efforts towards improving gender

equality and empowering women. There had already been excellent progress in that regard: the number of UNDAFs with a common work area on gender equality and the empowerment of women had increased from 47 to 62 per cent since 2010. UN-Women was endeavouring to seize the opportunities created by that upward trend by incorporating guidance from the quadrennial comprehensive policy review and the Secretary-General's reports into its strategic plan.

32. Many initiatives had moved from the planning to the implementation phase. At the global level, UN-Women was implementing the Spotlight Initiative, a joint project launched in September 2017 by the United Nations and the European Union focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls. At the national level, all activities of UN-Women were being implemented as part of joint United Nations programmes under the leadership of empowered resident coordinators. The Executive Board had agreed that it would report annually on the progress made by UN-Women in its implementation of the flagship initiatives and its adherence to the common chapter and the United Nations system-wide document.

33. **The President** asked how agencies like UNFPA could contribute to a system-wide approach to partnerships.

34. **Mr. Alakbarov** (Director of the Programme Division of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)), panellist, said that the common chapter had accelerated the drive for a common approach to the 2030 Agenda: 60 per cent of UNFPA indicators were currently adapted to Sustainable Development Goal indicators and 53 per cent of the outcome and output indicators of the strategic plans of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women were aligned. Moreover, 85 per cent of indicators currently addressed Economic and Social Council mandates to boost national ownership of projects and scale up results.

35. The UNFPA strategic plan, 2018–2021, focused on three transformative goals: an end to the unmet need for family planning; an end to preventable maternal deaths; and an end to all harmful practices against women and girls. Nevertheless, the 2030 Agenda was a shared promise that could not be implemented without sound and reliable data. Over the next four years UNFPA intended to work with the Statistics Division, the regional commissions and UNDP on the implementation of censuses in over 150 countries and territories in order to empower national and regional actors with strong data and evidence.

36. UNFPA, which valued its partnerships with all United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies, had launched the HIV prevention 2020 road map with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, was co-chair of the Global HIV Prevention Coalition with UNICEF and participated in the Spotlight Initiative. It had recently created the Demographic Dividend Atlas for Africa, which contained data to help Governments to track progress. UNFPA had also launched numerous projects in the Sahel region, including a recent campaign to raise awareness among young people about the importance of their physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health.

37. Since partnerships were impossible to maintain without sufficient and predictable funding, the reduction in core contributions to United Nations specialized agencies was a serious cause for concern. UNFPA therefore supported efforts to work with the private sector and non-traditional partners and advocated continuing discussions on a funding compact. The newly-created Joint Policy Fund to Advance the 2030 Agenda through Integrated Policy was also a good example of integrated policy and partnership support within the United Nations development system.

38. UNFPA, which was being restructured and looking for further efficiencies, fully supported the Secretary-General's proposed reform of the development system. UNFPA had integrated its back offices with UNDP in every country, including all banking and administrative services; its country office had been co-located in most Member States; and UNFPA had already agreed to be represented by UNDP in a number of countries.

39. **Mr. Aguirre Vacchieri** (Chile) welcomed the fact that, in comparison with the previous year's Council session, United Nations entities appeared to have accepted the need to move away from a silo approach towards closer cooperation. He wondered what the advantages and disadvantages might be of the Secretary-General's proposal to create a joint executive board of the New York-based funds, programmes and specialized agencies. In addition, while acknowledging that a regional approach made it more efficient to channel resources and initiatives, he asked the Executive Secretary of ECLAC what added value Member States and the United Nations development system could derive from regional forums on sustainable development.

40. **Ms. Nguyen** Phuong Nga (Viet Nam) asked what challenges the New York-based funds, programmes and specialized agencies had faced in applying the new working methods, especially the co-location of offices and rearrangement of work by thematic clusters. It would also be useful to know how best to improve the cohesion, efficiencies and effectiveness of United

Nations country teams in the face of significant reductions in core resources.

41. **Ms. Zahir** (Observer for Maldives), speaking on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, asked to what extent the strategic plans of United Nations entities incorporated the mandate contained in paragraph 10 of General Assembly resolution 71/243 regarding support for developing and vulnerable countries. She also expressed concern that the Secretary-General's proposal to streamline country presence might, in the long term, have a negative impact on smaller entities that consistently served as non-resident agencies.

42. **Ms. Fladby** (Norway) asked what individual funds, programmes and specialized agencies could do to simplify their country programming procedures and whether it might be conceivable for the country programmes to be discontinued altogether. She also wondered whether steps had been taken to grant resident coordinators greater leadership, such as the authority to approve the annual work plans of United Nations entities.

43. Given the insufficient investment in gender equality and women's empowerment highlighted in the Secretary-General's report (A/72/684–E/2018/7), she enquired whether there were plans to introduce common gender markers for the entire United Nations system. Increasing linkages between results and resources would help to illustrate the progress that was being made for women.

44. She encouraged the United Nations to ensure that entities within the United Nations development system operated according to the principle of mutual recognition of best practices. That principle was particularly important in the case of joint programmes, which tended to entail heavy transaction costs.

45. **Mr. Chang** (United States of America) asked the panellists about their experience of working with sister agencies and what they would like to change or improve in such relationships. It would also be interesting to know what improvements could be made to the system-wide strategic document to help United Nations entities work together more effectively.

46. **Mr. Elkhishin** (Observer for Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the quadrennial comprehensive policy review provided the mandate for United Nations system-wide strategic policy orientations and operational modalities for development cooperation. Reform of the United Nations development system should aim to foster system-wide support for the national priorities and needs of developing countries. In that vein, United Nations country teams and United Nations development system entities should align their work and strategic plans with the national development strategies of developing countries.

47. The substantive overlap between the Secretary-General's report on repositioning the United Nations development system (A/72/684–E/2018/7) and the United Nations system-wide strategic document (A/72/684–E/2018/7, annex) could lead to unnecessary duplication and confusion. The Group wished to express its preference to focus on the report of the Secretary-General.

48. General Assembly resolution 71/243 was a development-focused resolution that sought to address the overarching goal of poverty eradication. In that context, the proposed cross-pillar approach of the system-wide strategic document went beyond the mandate of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review and risked shifting the focus of the United Nations development system away from development. In accordance with paragraph 24 of the above resolution, the linkages between development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding efforts should be limited to enhancing coordination among those three areas at the national level within the specific context of countries facing humanitarian emergencies and countries in conflict and post-conflict situations.

49. Lastly, the proposal to consider the system-wide document as a "living document" also went beyond the mandate provided for in General Assembly resolution 71/243.

50. **Mr. Momeni** (Observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the United Nations development system had good capacity for helping Member States to tackle their common problems. However, it lacked a focal point responsible for capacity-building to distinguish between the capacity-building needs of developing and developed countries. He asked what regional commissions expected to gain from the reform process and what the United Nations could do to better equip them for regional challenges and crises.

51. **Ms. Steiger** (Observer for Switzerland) said that her delegation would appreciate clarification on what was meant by the results-based approach of the common chapter. To ascertain the specific impact of the common chapter on how agencies worked together, it would be useful for entities' integrated results and resource frameworks to list the contributions of the common chapter more specifically. Her delegation would also welcome specific examples of the challenges faced in meeting the objectives listed in the common chapter. She wondered whether the rationale behind creating a

platform for the four organizations applying the common chapter was to divide labour more efficiently and thus make the entities compete with each other less.

52. **Ms. Andreyeva** (United Kingdom) said that her delegation would be interested to hear how the funds, programmes and specialized agencies incentivized and maintained a collective focus on innovation, which was one of the key factors in the results-based approach of the reform process. She also wished to know which fields would be emphasized as priorities at the regional level to reduce duplication of work. She asked how ILO complied with the Secretary-General's proposals regarding common business services and back-office functions.

53. **Ms. Banos** (El Salvador) said that her delegation appreciated the way in which ILO was measuring the Sustainable Development Goal indicators for which it was custodian and wondered whether other entities had implemented, or planned to implement, similar strategies to measure results. She would welcome details on the efforts of regional commissions to harmonize measurements of indicators.

54. **Ms. Lagrange** (France), commending UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women on their adoption of ambitious plans as part of the common chapter, asked how they intended to work together to achieve the objectives of the strategic document; how the funds, programmes and specialized agencies would improve coverage of the Sustainable Development Goals and avoid duplication, while leaving space for non-United Nations partners to contribute to the advancement of Agenda 2030; how the New York-based funds and programmes would participate in the Joint Steering Committee to advance humanitarian and development collaboration; and what the panellists saw as the benefits of the United Nations regional commissions and regional development groups.

55. **Mr. Rahman** (Observer for Bangladesh), speaking on behalf of the Group of Least Developed Countries, said that while the Secretary-General's report (A/72/684–E/2018/7) referred to gaps in coverage of the Sustainable Development Goals, the system-wide strategic document gave little indication of how to address them. He asked the panellists what measures could be taken to overcome those gaps.

56. Bangladesh and other least developed countries were concerned by recent attempts to redefine the status of countries with special needs. It would be important to reconcile the strategic document with the mandate emanating from the quadrennial comprehensive policy review in that regard.

57. Although Member States benefited greatly from regional commissions, their approaches could sometimes be excessively traditional. He asked whether the regional commissions had considered revamping their methods to offer Member States more innovative solutions to the problems that they faced.

58. **Mr. Engels** (Observer for the Netherlands) asked the representatives of UNDP and UNICEF what improvements could be made to the system-wide strategic document to boost inter-agency cooperation in support of concrete results at the national level.

59. **Ms. Luna** (Observer for the Dominican Republic) asked how ECLAC was working with Member States to help them achieve the 2030 Agenda.

60. **Ms. Mendoza Elguea** (Mexico) said that the regional commissions played a crucial role in promoting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. She requested more details on the work done at the regional level by the United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies, especially the work of ECLAC.

61. **Mr. Higuchi** (Japan) asked the panellists what time frame was envisaged for the integration of the back offices of United Nations country teams and whether there were likely to be bottlenecks that impeded the process.

62. **Ms. Werdermann** (Germany) said that various concerns about gaps and duplication of work had not been addressed in the system-wide strategic document. She requested further details about the follow-up process and time frame for updating the document.

63. **Ms. Leyva Regueira** (Observer for Cuba) said that the system-wide strategic document should not reinterpret or duplicate the mandate emanating from the quadrennial comprehensive policy review. The document should instead be used to: identify thematic gaps in capacity within the development system and ways to solve them; enhance the functions of the development system to meet countries' increasingly diverse needs through a comprehensive, flexible and inclusive approach; and examine and replicate the strengths of United Nations development system functions and activities.

64. A key method for replicating success was to exchange experiences. In the light of the outstanding support that Cuba had received from the United Nations development system and the regional commissions during the recent hurricane season, she asked the Executive Secretary of ECLAC how the experience of the regional commissions could feed into the final version of the system-wide strategic document.

65. **Ms. Pindera** (Canada), emphasizing the importance of building monitoring and evaluation capacities on the ground, requested the panellists' opinions on the proposal by the Secretary-General to establish an independent system-wide evaluation unit. It would be particularly interesting to learn of cases in which there were interlinkages in the monitoring and evaluation efforts of United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies.

66. Although the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding nexus reinforced efforts by United Nations entities to prevent crises and conflicts, it could sometimes create additional challenges. She requested further information on the difficulties faced in implementing strategic plans simultaneously across all three dimensions of the nexus.

67. **Ms. Mafole** (South Africa) said that under the Secretary-General's proposals, some Member States would be recategorized at a higher income status and fewer resources would therefore be allocated to United Nations operational activities in that country. She asked whether consultations could be arranged for those Member States affected and measures taken to help them adapt to the sudden drop in resources. Similarly, she asked whether UNDP intended to ensure that developing countries not categorized as vulnerable would continue to be supported at the appropriate level. Lastly, she requested more information on the role of the Economic Commission for Africa in the reform process.

68. **Mr. Alessawi** (Iraq) said that the repositioning of the United Nations development system required an integrated approach. His delegation was concerned about the financial impact of some of the proposed initiatives, such as the separation of the functions of the resident coordinator and the UNDP resident representative. Any new vision for the reorganization of the United Nations development system should strengthen the role of the regional commissions in supporting development efforts at the regional level.

69. Each country had particular sustainable development needs that could be met through active cooperation with the United Nations country teams. There were also diverse transnational development issues, such as climate change, water, migration and trade, that could not be properly addressed within a purely national framework. Successful solutions to those issues were contingent on cooperation between the States of the region through the regional commissions. The repositioning process should acknowledge the importance of those issues and the role played by the regional commissions, particularly the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, in addressing them.

70. His delegation supported the proposal for the regional teams of the United Nations Development Group and the regional coordination mechanisms to hold meetings jointly or back to back, with agendas informing one another; for those entities to be serviced by a common secretariat; and for the strengthening of the participation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in the regional coordination mechanism. However, his delegation had questions regarding the common secretariat, such as what its methods of work would be and whether it would require additional resources. In addition, he asked why the existing structure within the regional economic and social commissions could not be leveraged to support the common secretariat.

71. **Ms. Crabtree** (Turkey) asked how reform of the United Nations development system would affect the regional offices of United Nations agencies in the medium and long term.

72. **Mr. Steiner** (Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women were working together to translate the common chapter into operational guidelines and were looking into opportunities for joint planning, monitoring, communication and resource mobilization. The areas of collaborative advantage identified in the common chapter were underpinned by indicators and targets. UNDP and others had fed into the system-wide strategic document, with a view to achieving common outcomes. The fact that each fund, programme or specialized agency had a distinct mandate did not mean they should operate in silos on the ground; indeed, it was virtually impossible to do so.

73. The United Nations produced almost identical Humanitarian Response Plans year after year and had even had to invent the term "protracted crisis" to describe the situation in some areas, which should give both the Organization and Member States pause for thought. When missions were drawn down, the number of personnel shrank drastically almost overnight, which jeopardized the gains made in the affected country.

74. The funds, programmes and specialized agencies had launched dozens of mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support strategy missions. He welcomed the establishment of the Joint Policy Fund to Advance the 2030 Agenda through Integrated Policy and the Spotlight Initiative as a positive step.

75. Back-office functions offered a great deal of potential for efficiency gains. UNDP already provided payroll services for some 17,000 staff. However, as the market for back-office services was not competitive, the opportunity for economies of scale was limited.

76. **Mr. Ryder** (Director General of the International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that the establishment of common premises and back-office functions would result in efficiency gains. However, the payroll and procurement processes and human resources policies of each entity would need to be harmonized.

77. In answer to the question about whether to grant resident coordinators the authority to approve work plans, he said that if ILO removed management lines with staff in the field, it would no longer be accountable in the same way for its programmes. ILO needed to look carefully at arrangements on the ground to ensure that it was promoting greater cohesion without forgoing its responsibilities.

78. System-wide evaluations could be valuable but should complement, rather than duplicate, the types of evaluations already carried out by United Nations entities. ILO had invested heavily in evaluation and oversight mechanisms in recent years, which had greatly improved the quality of its work. The United Nations system was getting better at working together to achieve collective outcomes. Partnerships enabled entities to look at common issues from different institutional perspectives and add value; however, entities could not go beyond their individual mandates.

79. In terms of innovation, ILO was conducting a major business process review to reduce the cost of internal processes. Anything that funds, programmes and specialized agencies could do to reduce administrative complexity, bureaucratic overload and excessive transaction costs would be universally beneficial.

80. **Ms. Fore** (Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the co-location of United Nations entities could be extremely beneficial, although it was not always the best solution. The creation of a joint executive board was a decision for Member States.

81. The funds, programmes and specialized agencies could do more to simplify planning. They should carry out joint risk and country analysis, needs assessments, real-time monitoring and reporting. They should also work together in areas such as human resources and information and communications technology. The focus should be on results, not processes. She expected the United Nations Development Group to come up with some practical solutions, including on the issue of gender equality.

82. The common chapter identified six areas of collaborative advantage. In 2018 UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women should pick one or two of those areas and deliver a couple of specific outcomes. They should also work together beyond the common chapter.

83. UNICEF had already identified two common themes under the system-wide strategic document: climate change and data.

84. The majority of the Fund's resources went to vulnerable countries, but as many such countries still did not have sufficient resources there was a need to work with other partners. The allocation of resources was based not only on the income status of States but also on data on children, which ensured that the needs of each country were taken into account.

85. Inter-agency cooperation was most effective when the entities balanced out one another's strengths and weaknesses. For instance, an entity with strong intellectual capital but no in-country staff might work well with an entity with a strong presence on the ground.

86. A number of programmes had been developed in the context of the development-humanitarian-peacebuilding continuum. In South Sudan, for instance, in addition to receiving food aid, the mothers of malnourished children were given seeds and tools to help them to become self-sufficient.

87. **Mr. Glemarec** (Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)) said that there was unprecedented eagerness within the United Nations to work together in the field of innovation. UN-Women had benefited greatly from the expertise of other United Nations entities. For instance, it had worked with WFP to develop systems for providing cash transfers to women refugees and to ensure access to markets for women farmers. UN-Women had no blockchain technology experts, but it was able to make use of such technology through cooperation with other United Nations entities.

88. The common chapter would be implemented through global thematic programmes, such as the Spotlight Initiative, and regional programmes, such as the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. The main barrier to the implementation of the common chapter was funding. The Spotlight Initiative had been made possible thanks to a pledge of €500 million from the European Union. It remained to be seen whether the

United Nations system would be able to move as quickly on issues such as maternal and neonatal health.

89. There was a need to ensure that entities had incentives to work together. At present, it was a zero-sum game, whereby one agency receiving funding meant that another received none. UN-Women was striving to streamline its processes. For instance, it was working to link up its systems with the Organization's central database, which would mean that information entered by UNICEF staff would immediately be visible to all other entities.

90. With regard to the question of common premises, in October 2017 he had visited the Solomon Islands, where UN-Women was running a project that was making a real difference. UN-Women would not be able to have a presence in the Solomon Islands if it were not for the joint office managed by UNDP.

91. **Mr. Alakbarov** (Director of the Programme Division of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that UNFPA was not wedded to any particular governance and accountability mechanism. However, the mechanisms currently in place had been developed over decades with a view to creating linkages between budgets and results, ensuring national ownership and providing a clear audit trail for donors. They could be simplified, but that must not be allowed to affect the efforts of UNFPA to achieve its three transformative goals.

92. The Istanbul office of UNFPA had been co-located with that of UNDP. The office was working with UNICEF and UN-Women to provide technical assistance and policy advice in the region. It was also working with the Economic Commission for Europe on policy development and analysis. UNFPA had recently changed its business model and had adapted its country presence to ensure that country offices were larger where needs were greatest. The revised business model was very much in line with the Secretary-General's reform process.

93. **Ms. Bárcena** (Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); and current Coordinator of the Regional Commissions) said that the regional forums on sustainable development were an opportunity for Member States to learn about common methodologies for incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals into national plans. The resident coordinators and representatives of the private sector also took part in the forums, which were an important platform for peer learning.

94. Small island developing States faced two main issues: poor connectivity and vulnerability to natural disasters. In the Caribbean, ECLAC was examining the possibility of a debt swap initiative, whereby a small portion of the region's debt would be transformed to create a resilience fund. ECLAC and UNDP must work together to develop a single methodology for responding to hurricanes. ECLAC had expertise in assessing the economic and social damage caused by a hurricane, while UNDP focused on post-disaster needs assessment.

95. ECLAC was working to address tax evasion. In Latin America and the Caribbean, tax evasion amounted to approximately 6 per cent of regional gross domestic product; that money should be going towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

96. ECLAC also did a great deal of work at the subregional level. In Central America, for instance, ECLAC was active in areas such as electrification and climate change. She recalled that ECLAC had been behind the establishment of the Central American Common Market. There was a need to see how subregional offices could work better together.

97. While the regional commissions were part of the United Nations development system, they were also part of the Secretariat. As such, the regional commissions were already engaged in implementing the global service delivery model. She called for the regional commissions to be given a greater voice.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.